

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-17 (cancelled)

18. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 34, wherein:

a plurality of said preloading portions are provided between said male shaft and said female shaft; and

a plurality of said torque transmitting portions are provided respectively between adjacent preloading portions.

19. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 18, wherein said preloading portions are provided at intervals of 120° in a circumferential direction and said torque transmitting portions are respectively provided between said preloading portions.

20. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 19, wherein said torque transmitting portions are provided at respective central portions in the circumferential direction between said preloading portions.

21. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 34, wherein said at least one rolling member comprises a spherical member.

Claim 22 (cancelled)

23. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 34, wherein a solid lubricant film is formed on one of the outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and the inner peripheral portion of said female shaft.

24. (previously presented) A telescopic shaft according to Claim 34, wherein said telescopic shaft is constructed for incorporation in a vehicle steering mechanism.

Claims 25-33 (cancelled)

34. (currently amended) A telescopic shaft in which a male shaft and a female shaft are fitted to each other to be able to transmit torque therebetween and move relative to each other in an axial direction, comprising:

a torque transmitting portion provided in an outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and in an inner peripheral portion of said female shaft for transmitting torque, said torque transmitting portion comprising spline fitting portions or serration fitting portions formed on an outer peripheral surface of said male shaft and an inner peripheral surface of said female shaft, said spline fitting portion or serration fitting portion of said male shaft and said spline fitting portion or serration fitting portion of said female shaft being always in slidable contact with each other;

~~at least one rolling member provided between the outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and the inner peripheral portion of said female shaft and rolling when said male shaft and said female shaft are relatively moved in the axial direction; and~~

~~—— a preloading portion which includes an elastic member provided adjacent to said rolling member for applying preload on said male shaft and said female shaft through said rolling member~~

a preloading portion composed of a first axial groove provided on an outer peripheral portion of said male shaft and a second axial groove formed on an inner peripheral portion of said female shaft opposed to said first axial

groove at a peripheral position that differs from said torque transmitting portion, at least one rolling member provided between the first axial groove of said male shaft and the second axial groove of said female shaft and an elastic member disposed between said first axial groove and said rolling member for preloading said male shaft and said female shaft; and

said elastic member including a leaf spring having opposite ends spaced in a peripheral direction of the telescopic shaft that are in contact with said male shaft and that are in contact with and that depress said rolling member from respective sides thereof along the same peripheral direction.